



## La Familia Michoacana Fact Sheet

### Introduction:

*La Familia Michoacana* originated in the 1980s and was primarily a marijuana production and distribution organization led by Carlos Rosales-Mendoza. *La Familia Michoacana* became an independent drug trafficking organization (DTO) and allied itself with the Gulf Cartel, specifically Los Zetas, and former Consolidated Priority Organization Target (CPOT) Osiel CARDENAS-Guillen. This alliance helped expand *La Familia Michoacana's* drug trafficking operations to southern Jalisco and into the State of Mexico. Since then, *La Familia Michoacana* has severed ties with *Los Zetas* in an effort to take control of Michoacán from any external influences.

### Structure:

In 2004 and 2005, Mexican authorities arrested Carlos ROSALES-Mendoza and *Zeta* member Omar LORMENDEZ-Pitalua, Rosales-Mendoza's close ally, resulting in new organizational leaders Jesus MENDEZ-Vargas (aka "Chango"/ "Chuy") and Nazario MORENO-Gonzalez. Dionisio LOYA-Plancarte ("El Tio") is considered the current second-in-command, having served as the communications specialist, but is now the voice of the organization and in charge of propaganda operations across Mexico. Samer SERVIN-Juarez and Alfonso CHAVEZ-Ruiz have been identified as key financial operators for the DTO. Servando Gomez Martinez ("La Tuta") is also a top leader of the organization and is believed to be responsible for the July 2009 murders of 12 Mexican Federal Police officers. Upper echelon members are plaza chiefs throughout the state who work collectively under both MORENO-Gonzalez and MENDEZ-Vargas.

Comprised predominantly of Mexicans (but potentially some Guatemalans and Salvadorians), uncorroborated reports suggest that the group may have initially formed as a vigilante group to counter local street crime and law enforcement corruption. According to Mexican law enforcement, *La Familia Michoacana* operates by means of an executive council, comprised of visible leaders (business and government officials) and clandestine leaders (drug traffickers from various municipalities).

According to intelligence, members of *La Familia* must complete a 3-6 month training camp in Michoacán, conducted by ex-members of the Colombian or Mexican Special Forces. The DTO uses equipment, weapons, and uniforms similar to those of the Federal Investigations Agency, and therefore operates without being detected in cities and on highways.

**Beliefs:**

This DTO has a strong religious background. It purportedly originated to protect locals from the violence of drug cartels. Now, *La Familia Michoacana* uses drug proceeds to fuel their agenda that encompasses a Robin Hood-type mentality – steal from the rich and give to the poor. They believe they are doing God’s work, and pass out bibles and money to the poor. *La Familia Michoacana* also gives money to schools and local officials.

**Modus Operandi:**

*La Familia Michoacana* is an extremely violent drug trafficking organization operating primarily in the State of Michoacán, Mexico. *La Familia Michoacana* is a compartmentalized organization heavily involved in narcotics trafficking, kidnapping, extortion, and other criminal activities.

Intelligence indicates that *La Familia* is involved in the distribution of methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana. *La Familia* is heavily involved in the production of methamphetamine, based in Michoacán, which is manufactured strictly for export to the United States.

Investigation has shown that this organization operates internationally in numerous countries and in various capacities. The organization brokers ton-quantity loads of cocaine directly from Colombia, or through Venezuela, Panama, and Guatemala. *La Familia Michoacana* then transports the loads to Mexico for breakdown and ultimate transport through Gulf Cartel territories and across the Mexican-U.S. border. Independent distribution cells have been identified in Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and various locations in California and North Carolina

*La Familia Michoacana* operates independently to facilitate its complex drug trafficking activities from brokering loads of cocaine from Colombia to distribution in various cities in the United States. However, members of *La Familia Michoacana* have purposely disconnected themselves from both the Gulf and Sinaloa Cartels in an effort to gain their independence and perhaps remain neutral in the face of the violent confrontations among various elements of those cartels.

An open source article published in September 2008 estimates that *La Familia* now operates in 77 municipalities of the state, which is nearly 60 percent of the state’s 133 municipalities.

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